

Acts 15:1-34 Fighting For the Gospel of Grace

I. The Gospel is Threatened in Antioch (1-3)

A. Paul and Barnabas Defend The Gospel (1-2a)

1. Judaizers Come Teaching To Antioch (1)

- a. They taught that faith in Jesus was Necessary for salvation
- b. They taught that circumcision was also necessary for salvation
- c. They taught that Gentiles must follow the law of Moses in order to be saved

2. Judaizers Are Opposed by Paul and Barnabas (2a)

- a. Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute
- b. Paul and Barnabas would not allow the gospel of grace to be altered unopposed

B. Paul and Barnabas Are Sent To Jerusalem To Resolve The Debate (2b-3)

1. Paul and Barnabas Go to Elders and Apostles in Jerusalem (2b)

- a. The Church appointed them (and others) to bring the debate to the Apostles
- b. The Jewish Teachers came from Jerusalem so Paul is sent to Jerusalem to find answers

2. Paul and Barnabas Testify Along Their Journey (3)

- a. They passed through Phoenicia and Samaria
- b. They continued to describe what God was doing among the Gentiles
- c. Their testimony brought great joy to the believers
 - i. The OT prophesied that when God's kingdom arrived the Gentile nations would be drawn to it
 - ii. Now they see the Gentiles coming – they rejoice in what God is doing

II. The Jerusalem Council (4-21)

A. The Elders and Apostles Gather to Decide The Matter (4-6)

1. Paul and Barnabas Testify to the Jerusalem Leaders (4)

- a. They are welcomed by the elders and apostles
- b. They declare to them what God is doing among the Gentiles

2. Some Pharisees Said The Gentiles Must Become Jews To Be Saved (5)

- a. These are described as believers who are Pharisees
- b. They said it is necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised
- c. They said it is necessary for Gentiles to keep the law of Moses
 - i. Remember that the law of Moses isn't just talking about the Moral law of God

- ii. The law of Moses includes the sacrifices, the observances of days and festivals, and the requirements of purification
 - iii. They were saying that the Gentiles must become Jewish in order to be Christ followers
 - iv. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, so if the Gentiles were to be brought into the covenant people, they must obey the covenant stipulations
 - 3. The Church Leaders Meet To Decide the Matter (6)
- B. Peter's Speech Before the Council (7-11)
 - 1. God Himself Has Given Salvation To the Gentiles (4-9)
 - a. God Chose to Send Peter First To The Gentiles (7)
 - i. Peter stands to speak after much debate
 - ii. He reminds them that God chose Him first to go to the Gentiles
 - Peter is referring to God's call to Cornelius
 - b. God Gave the Holy Spirit to The Gentiles (8)
 - i. God is the one who knows the heart
 - The Jewish believers are busy judging the outward acts by the law of Moses
 - God looks inwardly at the heart
 - ii. God gave witness to their salvation by giving them the Holy Spirit
 - Peter is referring to the outward manifestation of the Spirit that Cornelius and his family experienced to prove to the Jews that they had received the Holy Spirit
 - Peter says they received the Spirit "just as we did also"
 - God has saved them – no doubt
 - c. God Made No Distinction Between Jew and Gentile (9)
 - He shows no difference in salvation between Jew and Gentile
 - He cleansed their hearts by faith – just like He cleansed the Jewish believers'
 - 2. God's Gospel Cannot Be Denied (10-11)
 - a. The Gentiles Should Not Bear An Unbearable Yoke (10)
 - i. Peter says they should be careful not to test God
 - ii. They cannot put a burden on Gentiles that not even the Jews can bear
 - b. The Gentiles And Jews Are Saved By Grace (11)
- C. Paul and Barnabas Give Testimony Before the Council (12)
 - 1. The Council Fell Silent After Peter's Speech

2. The Council Again Hears the Testimony of God's Wonders Among the Gentiles
 - a. They tell how God has corroborated the Gentile's salvation
 - b. God testified to his grace with signs and wonders
- D. James' Speech Before The Council (13-21)
 1. God is Bringing Gentiles Into The Kingdom As Gentiles (13-18)
 - a. God is Working Among the Gentiles (13-14)
 - i. James addresses the brothers (13)
 - ii. James confirms that Peter's testimony is true (14)
 - iii. God is taking people for His name from the Gentiles
 - b. God's Work is in Accordance With His Word (15-18)
 2. God's People Must Be United in Christ (19-21)
 - a. The Gentiles Should Not Be Troubled With Extra Burdens (19)
 - b. The Gentiles Must Turn From Paganism (20a)
 - i. They should abstain from things polluted by idols
 - ii. They should abstain from sexual immorality
 - c. The Gentiles Should Protect Table Fellowship with Jewish Believers (20b-21)
 - i. They should abstain from the eating of blood
 - ii. This includes things not properly prepared (strangled)
 - d. The Gentiles should accommodate the Jews because Moses' law is read in every synagogue in every city
- III. The People of God Must Unite Around Christ (22-34)
 - A. A Letter is Sent From Jerusalem To Antioch (22-29)
 1. Men Are Chosen To Bring the Letter to Antioch (22)
 2. Brothers are Both Jew and Gentile (23)
 - a. From the apostles and Elders in Jerusalem
 - b. To the "brothers" in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia
 3. The Jerusalem Elders Have Chosen Devout Men To Confirm Their Letter (24-27)
 - a. Men Who have not been sent by the apostles are troubling those in Antioch (24)
 - b. The Apostles and Elders have unanimously agreed on their course of action (25)
 - c. The Apostles Sent Men with the Letter to verify it (26-27)
 - i. They risked their lives for Christ
 - ii. They are Judas and Silas
 4. The Gentiles Do Well To Live Lovingly With their Jewish Brethren (28-29)

- a. No greater burden will be laid on them but these
 - b. Abstain from food sacrificed to idols
 - c. Abstain from blood and what is strangled
 - d. Abstain from sexual immorality
- B. Fellowship Between Jew and Gentile Flourishes Again (30-34)
 - 1. The church at Antioch Rejoiced and Were Encouraged
 - a. The congregation is gathered and receives the letter (30)
 - b. They were encouraged by it and rejoiced
 - i. The debate is solved. They are saved by grace
 - ii. Gentiles do not have to become Jews but they must turn from paganism
 - 2. The Messengers from Jerusalem Edified the Church (32-34)
 - a. Judas and Silas Encouraged the Brethren being prophets
 - b. They spent much time with them before returning to Jerusalem